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AUTHOR Sullivan, Suzanne, Comp.
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ABSTRACT

This annotated bibliography lists works by several sports historians and essayists, as well as sociologists and sports journalists who address the question, "Why baseball?", and examine the reasons for our national love of the game, the myths, and the legends. Annotations have been excerpted from summaries and reviews in the "Book Review Digest." Fiction, nonfiction, and short stories are included, as well as books selected from the collection of John Herbold, Head Baseball Coach at California State University, Los Angeles. (JD)

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"IT'S A HIT!"

Baseball in American Literature and Culture

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"IT'S A HIT!"

Baseball in American Literature and Culture

A selected annotated bibliography
compiled by Suzanne Sullivan,
Assistant University Librarian
and
A selected bibliography from the collection
of John Herbold,
Head Baseball Coach

Prepared to accompany an exhibition in
the University Library,
California State University, Los Angeles

June 15 - September 30, 1985

BASEBALL: A SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Baseball has been the subject matter of ballads, short stories, movies, novels, a Broadway musical, and, as the symbol of the dynamic element in American life, appears as one of the blessings to be conferred on the Middle Ages in Mark Twain's A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court. Twenty million spectators pay to watch the game every year and at least twenty-five million television sets are tuned in to the World Series annually. In Sport: A Cultural History, Richard Mandell notes that baseball is the only sport to have attracted competent historians and essayists of literary reputation. This list of books contains works by some of those historians and essayists as well as works by sociologists and sports journalists who address the question, "Why baseball?" and examine the reasons for our national love affair with baseball, the myths and the legends. Annotations have been excerpted from summaries and reviews in the Book Review Digest, various years.

NONFICTION

Angell, Roger. Baseball. New York: Harry Abrams, 1984.

A text by Roger Angell accompanies 133 color photographs by Sports Illustrated photographer Walter Iooss, Jr. Striking images of vast summer skies remind the viewer of the quality of silence "that invites us to go slow ...in order to reflect on what is before us and what is to come."

____, Five Seasons: A Baseball Companion. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1977.

Angell's pieces, all but one of which appeared in some form in the New Yorker, chronicle the seasons from spring training to the World Series. They are first hand accounts of the modern baseball world - the players, the clubs, the strife, and the quiet moments. Angell is considered the most enjoyable writer on what is still the most profoundly American of games.

____, Late Innings: A New Baseball Companion. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982.

These essays cover the period from 1977 to 1981 and, except for chapter one, all the material first appeared in the New Yorker. Mark Harris says, "Although Mr. Angell's specialty is baseball, he marvelously avoids the cliches and weary formulas that characterize baseball writing." His writing reveals baseball's innermost essence, as he presents the causes and effects of the game's binding and abiding spell.

_____, The Summer Game. New York: Viking, 1972.

This book collects Angell's New Yorker baseball writings from 1962 to 1971. One reviewer states that perhaps some would feel that a few of these pieces are a little too ephemeral for republication, but everyone who understands, along with the author, that baseball is a country of the heart will recognize The Summer Game as the treasure it is.

Baseball Reader: Favorites from the Fireside Books of Baseball; ed. by Charles Einstein. Philadelphia: Lippincott and Crowell, 1980.

The Baseball Reader covers a broad miscellany of the game's moments, real or imagined, from its roughly organized beginnings after the Civil War to the sixth game of the 1977 World Series. Contributors include some of America's finest writers: Thomas Wolfe, Mark Twain, James Thurber, Sherwood Anderson, Jacques Barzun, and Ogden Nash among others. The book includes John Updike's account of Ted Williams' last day at Fenway Park and is the baseball book to read if you can read only one.

Boswell, Thomas. How Life Imitates the World Series: An Inquiry into the Game. New York: Penguin - Viking, 1982.

In these essays Mr. Boswell explores the dimensions of the game as a subculture of American life. "Baseball," he writes, "is to our everyday experience what poetry is to common speech - a slightly elevated and concentrated form." He says that "the sense of elemental sanity and order we sometimes feel around baseball is not entirely a romantic wish; the game has at its core a distinct therapeutic quality."

_____, Why Time Begins on Opening Day. New York: Doubleday, 1984.

This collection of essays embraces a wide range of topics including commentary on baseball myths that persist despite logic and evidence to the contrary. The author, a Washington Post sportswriter, is sensitive to the "fourth dimension" of nostalgia and tradition that's inherent in baseball. Baseball is "living theater and physical poetry; it offers a kingdom built to human scale; it's a heightened and focused form of our common experience."

Brosnan, James Patrick. The Long Season. New York: Harper and Row, 1960.

This is probably the best factual account of life inside baseball. Jim Brosnan, a pitcher for the St. Louis Cardinals and the Cincinnati Reds, reports on the state of his mind between the wintry day he signed his contract and the autumn day the season ended. The author does not miss a phrase or a remark that might help shed light on the national pastime or those who play it.

Chieger, Bob. Voices of Baseball: Quotations on the Summer Game. New York: Atheneum, 1983.

A writer, editor and baseball addict, Mr. Chieger spent seven years combing baseball writings for the 2,000 sayings in this book. The quotes he has collected by and about players, managers, owners, wives, and others, do not support the description of baseball as an island of sanity in an insane world. This book provides "hilariously demented eloquence," fun for reading or browsing.

Crepeau, Richard C. Baseball, America's Diamond Mind, 1919-1941. (A University of Central Florida Book) Orlando: University Presses of Florida, 1980.

Crepeau examines the so-called Golden Era of baseball, the period between World War I and World II. His thesis is that the ever-changing values of the U.S. coincide with the ever-changing values of baseball. This thoroughly enjoyable book is as much about sociology as it is about baseball; it will appeal to the casual fan as well as the baseball scholar.

Guttmann, Allen. From Ritual to Record: The Nature of Modern Sport. New York: Columbia University Press, 1978.

Professor Guttman, Chairman of the Department of American Studies at Amherst College, offers speculations about what is and what is not unique about American sports. In one chapter he comments upon the distinctively American game of baseball and discusses why, with its appeal to record-keepers, it became the American sport. He suggests that the original popularity of baseball sprang from a pastoral quality in American life and he believes our popular sports express American individualism.

Hall, Donald. Fathers Playing Catch with Sons: Essays on Sports (Mostly Baseball). San Francisco: North Point Press, 1985.

Poet Donald Hall, the indoorsman nonpareil, has kept up with the sport of summer attracted by "an endless game of repeated summers, joining the long generations of all the fathers and all the sons." Included are lines of verse from poets Walt Whitman and Marianne Moore as well as recollection and reminiscences of players past and present. This is a book for browsing; its charm is the repetition of endless patterns refreshed by talent, energy, and humor.

Hill, Art. I Don't Care if I Never Come Back: A Baseball Fan and His Game. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1980.

This baseball fan's diary of the Detroit Tigers' 1979 season is reminiscent of the writing of Roger Kahn and Roger Angell; the author writes with the same tenderness and affection of seasons past which he recalls while watching the current scene. For the most part, the anecdotes are humorous and dwell on the game's characters and oddities.

Insider's Baseball: The Finer Points of the Game, as examined by the Society for American Baseball Research; L. Robert Davids, editor; with a forward by Bill James. New York: Scribner, 1983.

Nearly fifty articles from SABR publications of the past ten years have been included in this anthology. The contributors are scholars in their field, intent on communicating their scholarship, and they succeed marvelously. The essays are incisive, illuminating, and delightful. This book lives up to its title by going beyond sports-writing cliches and offering an informed, loving appreciation of its subject.

Kahn, Roger. The Boys of Summer. New York, Harper and Row, 1972.

Out of the author's lifelong love for the heroic Brooklyn Club has come this warm, witty, and nostalgic memoir of the Dodgers, who were given their nickname when one had to be a dodger of trolleys to survive in Brooklyn. Baseball is an inherently nostalgic subject because its best days always seem to be behind it and intellectuals have often been fascinated by it. Roger Kahn is an intellectual who has indulged his sentimentality and employed his skill in a way which will give pleasure to anyone interested in baseball.

Peterson. R. Only the Ball Was White: A History of Legendary Black Players and All Black Professional Teams. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1970.

This fascinating book rates along side Ritter's The Glory of Their Times as one of the truly important sociological contributions to the literature of baseball. Thanks to the prodigious research and conscience-prodding of the author, we know about the roles played by athletes in the segregated world of Black baseball. The author includes many details about the great teams and players, an all-time register of players and officials from 1884 to 1950, as well as innumerable pictures of hitherto obscure players.

Plimpton, George. Out of My League. New York: Harper and Row, 1961.

Plimpton, when editor of the Paris Review, fulfilled his desire to pitch against major league baseball stars in Yankee Stadium. It is an intriguing situation and the author writes with wit and perception of how it feels to be "out there" on the diamond. Portions of the book appeared first in Sports Illustrated.

Riess, Steven A. Touching Base: Professional Baseball and American Culture in the Progressive Era. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1980.

This book is a perspective study of the sociocultural heritage and significance of the development of professional baseball from its roots in the 1850's to its status during the Progressive Era. Riess examines the sport's primary elements in an attempt to discover its idealogical foundation. This is a rich resource for the sports historian, the social scientist, and the baseball enthusiast. It is a superior contribution to our understanding of baseball.

Ritter, Lawrence S. The Glory of Their Times: The Story of the Early Days of Baseball Told by the Men Who Played It; with a forward by John K. Hutchens. New York: Macmillan, 1966.

An oral history of the first three decades of this century was collected from twenty men whose lives were involved in baseball. This book contains their monologues, photographs, and other memorabilia. Wilfrid Sheed said this "seems to me quite simply the best sports book in recent memory...it tells it right." Red Barber described it as "The single best baseball book of all time."

Ritter, Lawrence S. and Donald Honig. The Image of Their Greatness: An Illustrated History of Baseball From 1900 to the Present. New York: Crown, 1979.

These photographic images have been assembled from major collections to provide a summary of the high points of nearly 80 years of baseball. The text is a literate condensation of this century's development of the sport. In the N.Y. Times Book Review, Joel Oppenheimer said, "All these faces staring out at us, and the bodies flying, sliding, throwing: These are baseball...I'm happy to say that every one of the photographs is pure American corn."

Schlossber, Dan. The Baseball Catalog. Middle Village, N.Y.: Jonathan David, 1980.

This is more than a collection of trivia. There are short episodes that broaden the reader's understanding and appreciation of the game. The catalog is rich in photographs, superstitions, and the language of baseball. It explains such things as the origin of the 7th inning stretch, and why a square infield has come to be called a "diamond." We also learn that "rhubarb" is an old theatrical term, from actors in mob scenes saying "rhubarb" over and over to simulate the angry confused sound of a mob.

Seymour, Harold. Baseball; 2 volumes. New York: Oxford University Press, 1960.

Harold Seymour, Professor of History at Smith College, has written what is considered to be the most comprehensive, serious, authoritative sociological study of baseball ever published. It is a work that describes baseball in the perspective of American history, based on the contention that baseball has, since its beginning, mirrored the economic and social growth of America. With scholarship, humor, and insight, the author explodes several myths and does a fine service to the game. Volume 1, The Early Years, traces baseball's origins through 1903. Volume 2, The Golden Age, covers the history of the game in the 20th century.

Smith, Leverett T. The American Dream and the National Game. Bowling Green University: Popular Press, 1966.

This book deals with the changing relationships between sports and society. Literary works and popular literature are examined - there are separate chapters on Hemingway and Ring Lardner. The author considers such sports problems as racial discrimination and gambling scandals. Written as a revision of a doctoral disseration, Smith's observations are based on a positive view of the role of play in culture.

Tygiel, Jules. Baseball's Great Experiment: Jackie Robinson and his Legacy. New York: Oxford University Press, 1983.

The experiment is personified in Branch Rickey, then president of the Brooklyn Dodgers, and Jackie Robinson who broke the baseball color line in 1946. Tygiel shows us Robinson's great stature, both as a man and an athlete, and makes the reader profoundly aware of his dignity, daring, and determination. The author provides an account of Black ballplayers since 1872 and the demise of the Negro Leagues following integration.

Voight, David Quentin. America Through Baseball. Chicago: Nelson Hall, 1976.

These essays are a spin-off of the author's larger history of baseball. Sociologist Voight views baseball as a mirror through which can be glimpsed the various qualities of our collective personality and he offers insights into some of the forces that have shaped the sport. Among the specific topics covered are nationalism, racism, unionization, and the changing modes of heroism. Professor Voight shows baseball to be a meaningful cultural institution.

____, American Baseball: v.1 From Gentleman's Sport to the Commissioner System. Norman, OK: Oklahoma University Press, 1966.
American Baseball: v.2 From the Commissioners to Continental Expansion. Norman, OK: Oklahoma University Press, 1970.
American Baseball: v.3 From Postwar Expansion to the Electronic Age. Philadelphia: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1983.

This socio-economically-oriented study is a history of organized baseball. The volumes provide a valuable historical context for understanding the sport. They contain material on the relation of sports to national cultural patterns and emphasis on the economics of professional baseball as it grew from semi-amateur to industrial status. This is solid research, by a professor of sociology and anthropology at Albright College in Pennsylvania. It is considered one of the primary and significant works on the game.

Whiteford, Mike. How to Talk Baseball; Illustrated by Taylor Jones. New York: Dember Books, 1993.

The subject of this book is the colorful vocabulary that distinguishes baseball's true believers and mystifies the uninitiated. The pages are sprinkled liberally with Taylor Jones's caricatures of baseball greats. The first section of the book offers twelve profiles of men who have enriched baseball's lore and language. This is followed by a glossary of baseball terms.

FICTION

Alone among American sports, baseball has inspired writers acknowledged to be major literary figures. Listed here are several novels and short stories suggested for reading pleasure. Fanciful, farcical, or futuristic, they incorporate baseball's established rituals and myths.

NOVELS

Coover, Robert. The Universal Baseball Association, Inc. J. Henry Waugh, Prop. New York: Random House, 1968.

Henry Waugh is an accountant who has devised an entire eight-club-league association for which he keeps records and whose imaginary players constantly intrude on his real life. The novel takes a satirical look at the reverence with which some fans and players and sports writers regard statistics and depicts some of the characters and the ambiance that have given baseball its mythic quality.

Davies, Valentine. It Happens Every Spring. New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1949.

Based on the film of the same name which starred Paul Douglas, Jean Peters, and Ray Milland, this is the story of a young chemistry teacher who satisfies a secret yearning to become a successful ball player. He accomplishes this by devising a compound which, when applied to a baseball, makes it completely repellent to wood. Reviewers considered this novel a sheer delight.

Harris, Mark. Bang the Drum Slowly, by Henry W. Wiggin: Certain of his Enthusiams Restrained by [the author]. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1956.

This novel centers on Bruce, a catcher, who is slowly dying of Hodgkin's disease. The narrator, the pitching star of the team, tries to keep the matter a secret, but eventually it becomes generally known and the rest of the book is concerned with the loyalty of Bruce's teammates to their dying friend. The dialogue is natural, earthy, and casually humorous. The bittersweet film of the same name, made in 1973, featured Michael Moriarty as Henry Wiggin and Robert De Niro as Bruce Pearson.

Heuman, William. Strictly from Brooklyn. New York: William Morrow and Co., 1956

This first person narrative of a (Brooklyn) Dodger fan provides off-the-record incidents of family life and love in Flatbush. Drawn with broad comic strokes - dialect and all - the quarrels, squabbles, and frustrations of Manny and his wife make light, often hilarious reading. Heuman is best known for his stories in the Saturday Evening Post.

Malamud, Bernard. The Natural. New York: Harcourt, Brace Jovanovich, 1952.

In this richly symbolic novel of the baseball hero as a contemporary knight, Roy Hobbes is the nearly invincible pitcher. Malamud combines the myths of big league baseball with legends of the Holy Grail - which in this case is a World Series victory. Considered an unusually fine novel, fast-paced, funny, and tragic, it was the basis for the 1983 film starring Robert Redford as Hobbes.

Roth, Philip. The Great American Novel. New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1973.

"Word" Smith, an 87 year-old sportswriter, narrates the history of a forgotten league and its team, the Rupert Mundys, cast out from their stadium on an endless road trip. A long, frequently hilarious chronicle about baseball and America's passionate pursuit of success, this book has been characterized as genuinely zany, a stupendous comic invention, and a shamelessly comic extravagance. It contains marvelously raunchy vignettes of sporting life and the author gleefully exploits our readiness to let baseball stand for America itself.

Shaw, Irwin. Voices of a Summer Day. New York: Dial Press, 1965.

The protagonist, Benjamin Federov, while watching his 13-year-old son play center field, recalls the events of his own life from his 13th year in 1927 until the present, 1964. The recollection of these events constitutes the book. Although not considered one of Shaw's better works, the outstanding feature of this novel is its neatness of form, both in style and arrangement. The descriptions are sometimes exquisite; Shaw manages each scene with the same distinguished ease.

Wallop, Douglas. The Year the Yankees Lost the Pennant. New York: W. W. Norton, 1954.

So far as is known, there never will be a big league outfielder who sells his soul to the devil, hits .545, and averages two home runs a game. But in this novel, a wonderful and hilarious tale about the craziest year that never was, there is a fellow who single handedly beats the Yankees out of a pennant.

This lighthearted and delightful fantasy is the basis for the Broadway musical, 'Damn Yankees,' and the subsequent film with Tab Hunter, Ray Walston, Jean Stapleton, and Gwen Verdon as Lola, the sultry handmaiden of the Devil, who gets whatever she wants.

SHORT STORIES

Bradbury, Ray. "Big Black and White Game," in Best Short Stories of 1956. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1956.

Cheever, John. "National Pastime," in Stories [by] Jean Stafford [and others]. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1956.

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Lardner, Ring W. "Alibi Ike," in Lardner, R. W. Collected Short Stories. Modern Library. First published by Charles Scribner and Son, New York: 1929, under the title, Round Up.

Malamud, B. "Pre-game," in Charyn, J. ed. The Troubled Vision: An Anthology of Contemporary Short Novels and Passages. New York: Collier Books, 1970.

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Thurber, James. "You Could Look It Up," in Best American Short Stories of 1942. ed. Martha Foley. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1942.

Updike, John. "The Slump," in Updike, J. Museums and Women, and Other Stories. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1972.

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The University Library acknowledges with gratitude the generous loan of memorabilia and books from the collection of John Herbold, Head Baseball Coach of California State University, Los Angeles.

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Green, Paul. Forgotten Fields. WI.: Parker, [n. d.]

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Ibach, Bob. Cub Fan Mania. New York: Leisure Press, 1983.

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Langford, Jim. The Game Is Never Over. Indiana: Icarns Press, 1980.

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